



Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

**WEST KOOTENAI WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
FIRE SALVAGE PROJECT DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE
November 2017**

Description of the Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to conduct a fire salvage and forest habitat enhancement project on 506 acres of the West Kootenai Wildlife Management Area (WKWMA), pending final approval of the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The proposed project would salvage approximately 1.6 million board feet of timber that burned in the Caribou Fire on September 2, 2017 in a high intensity crown fire. The intent of this proposed action is to avoid an accumulation of downed timber that could preclude ungulate movement across the landscape, promote natural regeneration of the forest where possible, and complete the work while the value of timber can cover the cost of the treatment. Existing roads would be utilized and no new roads would be constructed. A portion of the burned area would be retained to reduce sight distances and provide habitat diversity including 56 acres of snag patches that burned under high-intensity fire, 37 acres with excessive slopes ($> 35\%$), and areas that burned under low intensity fire. Any surplus revenue generated from this project could be used to fund future rehabilitation and forest management on the WKWMA that may include the replanting of trees and shrubs, as well as forest management work on other FWP properties across the state. Regardless of the alternative chosen, FWP would continue to manage the WKWMA for wildlife and compatible recreation activities and would evaluate the need to replant trees within 3 years, re-vegetate severely burned and disturbed areas, and/or conduct noxious weed management treatments.

Under Alternative B, the proposed action of the WKWMA Fire Salvage Project Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), FWP would implement the following activities on the WKWMA:

- Salvage fire-killed trees on 506 acres of severely burned conifer forest
- Retain 93 acres of severely burned conifer forest in 2 to 31 acre units to reduce sight distances and promote habitat diversity
- Evaluate the need to plant trees and/or shrubs within 3 years
- Monitor roads, log landings, and disturbed areas for up to 3 years post-treatment for potential herbicide treatment of weeds

Public Involvement

FWP is required by MEPA to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including

public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a Draft EA for public review of WKWMA Fire Salvage Project Draft EA for a 14-day public comment period from October 24, 2017 through November 8, 2017.

FWP posted a public notice on its webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov>, and notices were sent to numerous newspapers that included: *The Tobacco Valley News*, *Flathead Beacon*, *Western News*, *Daily Inter Lake*, *Whitefish Pilot*, *Hungry Horse News*, *Lake County Leader*, *Sanders County Ledger*, and other newspapers in western Montana as well as several radio stations. The Draft EA was available for viewing at local libraries and notice of this Draft EA was distributed to neighboring landowners and interested parties.

Summary of Public Responses

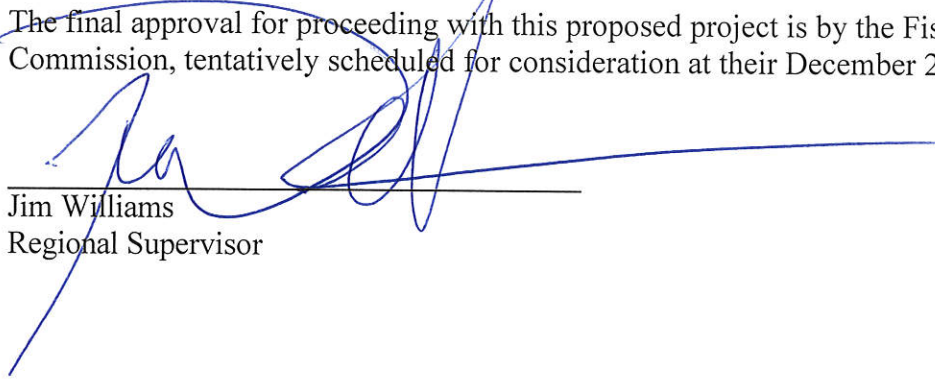
FWP received 34 responses to the Draft EA, all of which were positive and in support of the proposed action.

Decision

Based upon the Draft EA and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have measurable negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

In reviewing all the public comments and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental effects, I hereby approve Alternative B, the proposed action of the WKWMA Fire Salvage Project Draft EA.

The final approval for proceeding with this proposed project is by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, tentatively scheduled for consideration at their December 2017 meeting.



Jim Williams
Regional Supervisor

11/16/17

Date